

VZCZCXYZ0001  
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBO #1447/01 0461608  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 151608Z FEB 06  
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2305  
INFO RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUMIAAA/USCINCSO MIAMI FL  
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 001447

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

SOUTHCOM FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/15/2016  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [SNAR](#) [CO](#)  
SUBJECT: THE CONGRESSIONAL RACES: SUBSTANCE TAKING A BACK  
SEAT

REF: A. BOGOTA 1328  
[1](#)B. BOGOTA 1327

Classified By: Charge Milton K. Drucker, Reasons: 1.4 B & D.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Campaigning for the March 12 Congressional elections is thus far light on substantive issues and platforms. New electoral rules allow voters to cast ballots for individuals rather than parties, which could further erode the parties' ability to maintain legislative discipline in Congress. In essence, several center-right pro-Uribe parties and candidates are pitted against the center-left Liberals and Polo. Party heads almost single-handedly control placement on (or removal from) each party's list. Perceived electoral prowess is a major factor in selecting prospective candidates. Below we offer a brief overview of the leading parties, their platforms, and the most prominent figures in each movement. Ref B details the March 12 stakes and electoral dynamics. End Summary.

#### PRO-URIBE PARTIES

-----

[1](#)2. (C) The Conservative Party (Partido Conservador Colombiano, PCC), headed by Senator Carlos Holguin Sardi, is one of Colombia's two traditional parties. It opted not to run its own Presidential candidate, but instead backs Uribe for reelection. During the Uribe Administration, the party has largely voted in favor of the President's legislative initiatives, albeit with several notable exceptions, largely in the fiscal realm. The posts of Senate President and House Speaker (which alternate yearly) have been held by PCC members on several occasions during the Uribe Administration. Party faithful hold several key posts in the GOC. Interior and Justice Minister Sabas Pretelt hails from the PCC, as does Prosecutor General (Fiscal General) Mario Iguaran. (Comment: While Prosecutor General is not technically a GOC post, President Uribe sent to the Supreme Court three names for consideration for the post. All were rank and file PCC members. End Comment.) The PCC does not consider itself an "Uribista" party; PCC leaders say support for Uribe comes with the understanding that he will move forward with key PCC agenda items during his second administration. These include support for the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States, lowering tax rates while increasing the tax base, "formalization" of the informal economy, and expanded participation in key social programs, like subsidies for rural and urban families with children in school. Consistent with its Christian Democratic roots, the PCC is opposed to the decriminalization of abortion in Colombia.

13. (C) The U Party (Partido de la U), headed by former Finance Minister Juan Manuel Santos, fully supports President Uribe and counts in its ranks numerous political heavyweights, many of whom are, like Uribe, former members of the Liberal Party. Notable among these are Senators Luis Guillermo Velez, Carlos Garcia Orjuela, and Oscar Ivan Zuluaga, and Representatives Gina Parody and Armando Benedetti. Parody is number one on the party's Senate candidate list. Santos removed five party members from his Senate list in January for alleged ties to the AUC. Of late, Santos and Radical Change head German Vargas Lleras (see para 4) have captured attention for their obvious personal rivalry, if not mutual disdain. As an Uribista party, the U Party supports President Uribe's policies and increased access to health care, education, and public services. The U Party has taken a "wait and see approach" to the FTA.

14. (C) Radical Change (Cambio Radical), headed by Senator German Vargas Lleras, supports President Uribe publicly in spite of obvious and recurring tension between Uribe and Vargas Lleras (including Vargas Lleras accusations regarding GOC protection for him in the aftermath of a failed assassination attempt). Current Senate President Claudia Blum was slated to be one of the party's top Senate candidates (at number two, after Vargas Lleras at number one), but removed herself in order to be positioned for a cabinet position in a second Uribe Administration or to run for Mayor of Cali. Other major party figures include sitting Senators Miguel Pinedo and Javier Caceres. The latter is well-known for conducting headline-grabbing Senate hearings, particularly focusing on graft and corruption. Last month, Vargas Lleras removed two members of the party for alleged AUC ties. Radical Change candidates support President Uribe's policies, including the FTA and extradition.

15. (C) Democratic Colombia (Colombia Democratica) is headed by Senator Mario Uribe Escobar, the President's cousin. (Comment: The morning after the U Party had removed members for alleged ties to the AUC, Mario Uribe was on the radio publicly welcoming them into his party. Mario Uribe desisted only after President Uribe asked that parties supporting him for President not accept any of the expelled individuals. End Comment.) Senator Uribe announced the week of January 30 that Representatives Rocio Arias and Eleonora Pineda, vocal sympathizers of the AUC, would no longer be welcome in the party's ranks. The Democratic Colombia party supports the re-election of President Uribe and the continuation of his Democratic Security agenda.

16. (C) Wings-Team Colombia (Alas-Equipo Colombia, A-EC) is headed by Senator Luis Alfredo Ramos, a former Commerce Minister and Ambassador to the OAS. Most leading A-EC figures are former members of the PCC. Other notable party figures include Senator Alvaro Araujo, brother of former GOC Culture Minister Maria Consuelo Araujo, who heads the party's current Senate candidate list. Major A-EC issues include governmental decentralization, tax breaks for big business, help for the urban poor, and mandatory primary and secondary education.

#### ANTI-URIBE PARTIES

17. (C) Former President and OAS Secretary General Cesar Gaviria runs the Officialist Liberal Party (Partido Liberal Colombiano, PLC), one of Colombia's two traditional parties. Former cabinet minister Cecilia Lopez heads up the party's Senate list. The party will hold a national primary on March 12 to select its Presidential nominee. The contenders are Horacio Serpa (the PLC candidate in 1998 and 2002) and Senators Rafael Pardo, Rodrigo Rivera, and Andres Gonzalez. Serpa is the clear frontrunner for the nomination. Gaviria removed Senator Vicente Blel Saad from the PLC Senate list in January over publicly-reported ties to drug trafficking organizations. The PLC platform focuses on social issues, including access to education and credit, pension reform, and job creation. Liberals are generally opposed to the FTA.

18. (C) Senator Samuel Moreno Rojas heads the Alternative Democratic Pole (Polo Democratico Alternativo, PDA), the only major party on the far left of the political spectrum. As with the PLC, the PDA will hold a Presidential primary on March 12. The contest pits Senators Antonio Navarro Wolff (a former member of the demobilized M-19 guerrilla movement) and Carlos Gaviria Diaz against each other for the nomination. Heading the PDA's Senate list is Representative Gustavo Petro, one of Colombia's most vocal leftist figures. The PDA is currently discussing its platform and intends to make an announcement before the end of February. Party leaders say that key objectives will be consistent with general leftists goals: enhancing social programs, increasing taxes for wealthier Colombians, and decreasing military spending. The PDA is also considering more radical issues like agrarian reform and wealth and natural resources distribution, but it is not clear that these will make the formal platform.

COMMENT  
-----

19. (C) Thus far, the campaign has not witnessed much public discussion of real issues, and has been more focused on jockeying for position on party lists. This may be in part because the differences between the major parties, excepting the PDA, are minor. The major vote getters from the 2002 Congressional elections in general attained prime spots on major party lists. Party heads have tweaked their lists in recent weeks/days in response to negative information on one or more candidates.  
DRUCKER